

Are you ready to investigate an accident?

After an accident happens in the workplace, everyone wants to understand why it happened so that similar events can be avoided. It is often up to the Safety Manager or an incident investigation team to determine this. You can help this effort by having a good accident investigation kit available, and training your people on what they must do. Have the right tools for the job

Assemble all items needed for a thorough investigation, and let those responsible for the investigation become familiar with them. Some suggested items include:

1. Notebooks, clipboards, pens, pencils, and markers.
2. Graph paper.
3. Tape recorder, tapes, and spare batteries.
4. Camera and film.
5. Cellular phone or radio, for remote areas.
6. Monitoring and measuring devices, as needed.
7. Rope or tape to barricade the accident scene.
8. Caution/warning tags, labels and cable ties, and adhesive labels or white tape.
9. Simple hand tools such as pliers, wrench, or scissors.
10. Measuring tape.
11. Flashlight and spare batteries.
12. Sidewalk chalk.
13. Sandwich-sized zipper-style bags for collection of evidence.
14. Necessary PPE's for the location.

Team activation

If working with an incident investigation team, make sure that all members know how the team is activated. Explain how the team will work with any outside agencies, such as Cal/OSHA, OSHA, your insurance company, police or fire departments, and so on.

Documentation

Develop a checklist of documentation that will be required during and after an investigation. Cal/OSHA investigators will immediately ask for a site specific copy of the Company Illness and Injury Prevention Plan, training records for those involved in the incident, and site/equipment inspection records. Later, usually within a few days, and after the investigation starts an order to produce documents will be given the involved parties, ie., the General Contractor and Subcontractors. Under normal conditions this "request to produce" can be a daunting task and nearly impossible when dealing with the aftermath of a serious accident.

Develop good interviewing techniques

Interview witnesses as soon as possible. Following a traumatic experience, a witness may not be able to recall all of the pertinent information immediately. Multiple witnesses may have entirely different stories. Witnesses may remember more details with time, so plan on follow-up sessions.

Some witnesses may offer biased testimony if they feel a need to influence the findings, or they may omit entire sequences of events if they don't realize their importance. Good interviewing skills are gained with experience and practice. Have the most experienced team member train the others. Develop procedures which include follow-up interviews to confirm events or clarify key points. Analyze each witness's statement and place all of the available testimony into a logical order. Note inconsistencies and focus on clearing those up.

On-going training

Hold refresher training and mock drills as often as needed to make sure that all members of the team are comfortable with their roles, and understand what must happen in the event of an incident. Classes on incident investigation or presenters from local police or fire departments, insurance carrier, or accident Investigation Company are also valuable sources of information and insights.